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THE HABIT OF INSPIRATION

Ten high-fliers from a variety of professions let us in on the rituals that keep their creative juices flowing

Aclaimed author Ernest Hemingway had a peculiar manner of writing — he'd stand up, facing a wooden, chest-high bookshelf with a typewriter on it, over which there was a wooden reading board. He wrote longhand on paper till he was satisfied and only then would he use the typewriter. Benjamin Franklin, on the other hand, would ask himself at the end of every day, "What good have I done today?" Creativity, most masters will tell you, doesn't

have the luxuries of the right mood, time or ambiance. Ryan Germick, the head of Google's doodle team, says his professor told him early on that 'Inspiration is for amateurs'. Instead, it's the staid consistency of a routine that will do you good. We got ten achievers from different walks of life, from entrepreneurs to authors and neurosurgeons to share their unique routines. They may lack the romanticism of a "muse", but well-oiled patterns usually serve better than waiting for an A-ha moment, we find.

MASTER CLASS

REVIEW, IN SOLITUDE

Banker Mythili Balasubramanian, Chief GM, IDBI, re-evaluates problems

"However technical your profile may be, intuition always plays a big role in the way you approach something. I like to think about problems when I am not in the office, which means late at night before going to sleep. Invariably, I find a solution. This is because I use approaches I didn't consider earlier."



APPRECIATE THE MUNDANE

Chef Abhijit Saha stores little details for recall and use later

"I am inspired by different things I encounter daily. It could be a newspaper report, a magazine article, a picture on the Internet or anything else. I don't look at it and then wait for creativity to strike. I store the information in my mind and use it when I deem appropriate. I try to see beauty in the mundane."



CALM THE MIND

IT honcho and author Subroto Bagchi prays and reflects

"I learned one ritual from Narayana Murthy and modified the timing — he does it at the end of the day, I do it in the beginning. I kneel down, calm my mind and recount the incidents of the previous day. I pause to reflect if I said or did something that wasn't right, and seek forgiveness for each such action. It is cathartic. I have also added something to this practice — I take an additional couple of minutes to pray for someone's well being. That someone is drawn randomly from the mind, literally on the spur of the moment. This ritual shifts my awareness from the self to the collective. Between the two rituals, the reliving and the prayer, I feel I am ready for the day."



SEE THINGS FROM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Author Namita Gokhale, who is also the founder of the Jaipur Literary Festival, tries to look at things without being jaded

"I prefer random discipline to a strict daily routine. Sometimes I have to put my personal creative venture (of writing) on hold for the sake of the administrative duties of organising JLF. Still, creative thinking happens all the time. I try to see things and people without any prejudice or judgment and observe what makes them tick. Even today, I try to see things like I am looking at them for the first time."



TAKE A WALK

Entrepreneur Archana Shah of Bandhej takes a long walk after work

"After the day's work is done, I prefer to bin all issues and negativity before going home. I am fortunate to be living in a green belt of Ahmedabad. When I reach the gates of the community I live in, I alight from the car and take a walk. I try not to think much and just enjoy the greenery and solitude for at least 30 to 40 minutes. I go home only after that walk, all recharged."



TAKE QUARTERLY VACATIONS

Leading neurosurgeon Dr Swaroop Gopal, HOD Neurosurgery, Sakra world Hospital, recharges with vacations and music

"I have little time for anything on a typical day. It starts early and ends at about 10-11 pm. I recharge with music in my car when travelling across the city. I also treasure my time off with my wife and son and try to do this every quarter. Usually, we select a place with natural beauty rather than something totally urban. Our last visit was to Turkey and I thoroughly enjoyed it."



HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE

KV Sridhar aka Pops, Chief Creative Officer Leo Burnett India, believes in the power of a hot cuppa

"I believe early morning is the best part of the day. There is no baggage. I wake up early, sometimes at 5 am, just to enjoy a hot cup of coffee at that time. I keep my diary handy and start jotting down ideas. In spite of 600 people working IN my agency, I like to be prepared with my own ideas. Otherwise I feel guilty. There has to be a childlike curiosity in everything we do. Every beautiful moment is an idea of its own."



TALK TO A RANGE OF PEOPLE

Anirban Das Biah, MD Kwan Entertainment, a creative management company, invests time in an "interesting people fund"

"I make sure to talk to a diverse range of people, ideally from creative backgrounds. Conversations with people yield great ideas. It is always a moment of inspiration to see an idea become a work of art. That is what gets me thinking."



MEDITATE

Shtal Kakkar Mehra, etiquette expert, swears by meditation for finding tranquility

"I am a spiritual person. To get my bearings sorted for the day, I meditate for two to three minutes before I even get up from my bed. It is a way to rejuvenate and refresh myself for the day."



BE IN THE MOMENT

Meena Ganesh, serial entrepreneur stresses on the power of 'Now'

"Women tend to multitask and be perfectionists. So, we are pulled in different directions. I try to focus only on the task at the moment, to remain sane. Even though women see the entire picture, it is best to put our energy on just the task on hand. That helps you worry less about the outcome."



— Jayanthi Madhukar